

World and Nation

Two hostages return; price on remaining five may rise

PARIS (AP) — Joy over the release of two French hostages held in Lebanon was tempered Wednesday by speculation that the kidnapers, Iran or Syria may raise the price of freedom for those who remain.

The return home Tuesday of Camille Sontag, 85, and Marcel Coudari, 54, brought to five the number of French captives Shiite Moslem fundamentalists have freed this year.

At least five still are held, and Coudari corroborated previous reports that a sixth French kidnap victim may be dead.

In each release, the hostages passed through Damascus, capital of Syria. Premier Jacques Chirac has called Syria the obligatory passage way to any solution to the Lebanese crisis. Iran is an equally important

factor, commentators said Wednesday.

Le Matin, a Socialist-leaning daily, compared the freeing of hostages to a banking transaction in which two signatures are necessary: Syria and Iran.

The pro-government daily Le Figaro commented: "It is clear that, to obtain freedom for the other hostages, one must again pay the pound of flesh: At what level? We do not know. Blackmail? No doubt."

Chirac's government denies negotiating to free the Frenchmen and insists that its Middle East policy is not being determined by the hostage situation.

Iran and Syria praised France's Middle East policy after the kidnapers released Sontag and Coudari.

France is normalizing relations

with Iran. It recently agreed to pay \$330 million to settle a dispute over a \$1 billion loan made to France by the late Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was ousted in 1979 by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's fundamentalist Shiite revolution.

Sontag and Coudari were freed in Beirut on Monday, the day European Common Market foreign ministers met in London to take measures against Syria for its alleged support of terrorism.

Those adopted included an embargo on arms sales to Syria, which gets nearly all its weapons from the Soviet Union, and an end to high-level official visits.

France would not accept stronger sanctions. Those originally proposed by Britain, which broke relations with Syria last month, were diluted.

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Two planes nearly collide with 175 aboard

ATLANTA (AP) — Two jets carrying 175 people nearly collided with each other at 35,000 feet Wednesday after a controller was unable to warn the pilots to change course because of a stuck microphone, federal officials said.

No evasive action was necessary and there were no injuries resulting from the close encounter about 180 miles north of Atlanta, the Federal Aviation Administration reported.

FAA spokesman Roger Myers termed the incident a "near-mid-air collision." It involved United Airlines Flight 743 and Braniff Airways Flight 515 and occurred at 10:33 a.m. EST, FAA officials said.

It was not immediately clear how close the jets actually came, though a United official said the distance was less than a half-mile.

Myers said an air traffic controller at the FAA's Atlanta Air Route Traffic Center at Hampton was aware of the situation but was unable to contact the pilots because of an apparent technical difficulty.

"The controller attempted to take corrective action but was unable to communicate with either (pilot) because of a stuck microphone," Myers said.

He said FAA investigators were looking further into the matter and that the pilots of both planes would be interviewed.

The United flight was en route from Fort Myers, Fla., to Chicago and was carrying 99 passengers and seven crew members, said Chuck Novak, a spokesman at United's Chicago headquarters.

"We're showing it 100 miles south of Louisville, flying under air traffic control at 35,000 feet," Novak said. "The crew saw the other airplane, which was traveling west, and it passed behind our aircraft."

Irma Jensen, a spokeswoman for Braniff, said the flight, en route from New York's LaGuardia Airport to Dallas-Fort Worth, carried 62 passengers and seven crew members.

Braniff President Ron Ridgeway said Braniff was conducting its own investigation into the matter.

Bishops reaffirm loyalty to pope, pull out of dispute

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's Roman Catholic bishops, after daring to debate the Vatican's punishment of a fellow U.S. prelate, stepped back from confrontation with Rome on Wednesday by saying the Vatican's verdict "deserves our respect and confidence."

Their decision, after five hours of intense secret talks over two days, said that while the bishops sympathize with the pain of an embattled colleague, the pope in Rome still must come first.

The bishops, all appointed by Pope John Paul II or his predecessors and all subject to church discipline themselves, did not add to the Vatican's criticism of Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen. But neither did they defend him, as some of his supporters among the group had hoped they might.

"On this occasion the bishops of the United States wish to affirm unreservedly their loyalty to and unity with the Holy Father," Bishop James

Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement approved by most of the group's nearly 300 bishops.

"The conference of bishops has no authority to intervene" in the dispute between the Vatican and Hunthausen, he said.

Hunthausen was ordered by the Vatican earlier this year to give up much of his authority to a Rome-appointed auxiliary bishop after Vatican officials judged him too liberal on such matters as ministry to homosexuals and divorced Catholics and dispensation of general absolution for sin to large groups.

He was allowed to make his case to his fellow bishops at the secret sessions — sessions like none other in recent years — and he used the opportunity to complain that "a shroud of secrecy" around the Vatican's investigative process had kept "him from even seeing the formal charges against him."

Court urged to control affirmative action

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court, renewing its study of affirmative action in the American workplace, was urged Wednesday to strictly control preferential treatment for women and minorities in job promotions.

The Reagan administration led the assault on affirmative action plans in cases from Alabama and California as the justices for the first time directly examined job preferences for women.

Solicitor General Charles Fried, the administration's chief courtroom lawyer, said a court-ordered plan for promoting equal numbers of black and white state troopers in Alabama was illegal even though only a few jobs were at stake.

He argued that the court order aimed at correcting past employment discrimination by the state police was excessive in punishing innocent white troopers seeking promotion.

But J. Richard Cohen of Montgomery, Ala., representing the black troopers, said the federal judge who ordered the one-for-one promotion plan sought to overcome a history of discrimination by the state police department.

In the second case, the Santa Clara County Transportation Agency promoted a woman to dispatcher over a man deemed more qualified. A federal appeals court upheld the move as a means of overcoming the absence of women in higher-ranking agency jobs, although there was no court finding that the agency discriminated against women.

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Drug aids memories of 16 of 17 senile people

BOSTON (AP) — An experimental drug for Alzheimer's disease significantly improved the memories of 16 of 17 senile people treated in a study, and may be the first effective therapy for this devastating illness of old age, a researcher says.

Elderly people who did not know their sons and daughters or even their own names were able to recognize their families again after taking the pills. One man who was less severely affected went back to work part-time. A retiree who before could barely speak took up daily golf again, while another victim resumed driving, cooking and cleaning her house.

"If this is validated, I think we will have our first viable treatment for Alzheimer's," said Dr. William K. Summers, who directed the study.

The drug is not available for routine use. It cannot be prescribed by physicians. Until researchers learn more about it, the medicine will be given only to small numbers of people enrolled in carefully controlled studies.

Summers, an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, based his conclusions on the treatment of people with moderate to severe Alzheimer's senility.

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"Of these 17," Summers said, "four of them got dramatically better, seven got clearly better, and five of them got better to anybody's eye."

Summers said that his findings are encouraging but still preliminary, and he stressed that the drug does not cure Alzheimer's disease. Instead, it eases the symptoms of the disease, much as insulin controls diabetes or L-dopa relieves Parkinson's disease.

In an interview, Davis was cautious about the drug's potential.

"It's not a 'golden bullet,'" he said. "I do think this drug will help some people, and there is a market for it. I see it as a short, rational step" toward controlling Alzheimer's disease.

He noted that similar drugs have failed to produce dramatic results,

and he suggested that Summers' findings might result from fortunate selection of study subjects and careful monitoring of the patients' drug levels.

The experimental drug, called tetrahydroaminoacrine, or THA, was discovered in 1909 and first given to Alzheimer's victims in a pilot study by Summers eight years ago.

Summers said he is trying to obtain a patent on the medicine's use so that a drug company will take over the expensive job of testing it and obtaining approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. He said he approached four drug houses, and none was willing to take on the medicine, since without a patent they would not have exclusive rights to sell it.

Summers said he fears his encouraging results will touch off "mass hysteria" for the drug, particularly since no one knows when, or even if, it will be approved.

Alzheimer's disease is the primary cause of senility among the elderly. An estimated 1.5 million to 3 million Americans have the illness, and it causes more than 100,000 deaths each year.

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